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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2947
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RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 3175
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4202
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 8878
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 1709
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0976
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SUBJECT: ICRC SEES PROGRESS WITH GOM ON HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

REF: RABAT 448

Classified By: Pol/C Tim Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Over lunch May 18, ICRC Regional Delegate Bernard Pfefferle told Polcouns the ICRC was generally pleased with progress on the humanitarian issues it is working with the GOM, and especially with progress on resolving the issue of the disappeared between Morocco and the Polisario Front.

Anniversary of the Red Cross

12. (SBU) Visiting Morocco from Tunis to attend the anniversary of the Red Cross societies in Marrakech May 16, Pfefferle said he was pleased that the King's speech marking the occasion, which was read by Royal Advisor Zoulika Nasri, made three references to the ICRC's involvement in the release of Moroccan POWs, and also mentioned the ICRC president. This was somewhat of a breakthrough, Pfefferle said, since the GOM has tended to see the ICRC as tilting toward Algeria. The only blemish on the anniversary occasion, he said, was that the Algerians were the only Red Cross/Crescent society from the Middle East and North Africa not to attend the event. "It shows the extent of the wall between Morocco and Algeria," he said, an observation Polcouns did not refute.

Prison Access

13. (SBU) Pfefferle was also pleased at progress between ICRC and the GOM on the issue of prison access. In a recent meeting in Geneva, MOJ Bouzoubaa had given ICRC President Kellenberger verbal assurances of GOM approval for a prison agreement between the GOM and ICRC. Pfefferle had shared a draft MOU with the GOM on his last visit to Morocco in March (reftel), which was basically a carbon copy of agreements the ICRC had with Tunisia and Mauritania. The agreement would give ICRC private access to any prisoner in Morocco, regardless of offense or sentence, regardless of whether the facility was a prison or a detention center, and regardless of which government entity or security service administered the facility. Pfefferle said ICRC would focus on those imprisoned on security or terrorism charges. As the agreement was written to apply to any facility in Morocco, Pfefferle said the ICRC took that to include the Western

Sahara. Pfefferle was uncertain when the agreement would actually be signed, but he was satisfied that the initiative was on the right track.

Western Sahara: Resolving the Disappeared

¶4. (C) Pfefferle said he had visited Tindouf and Rabbouni three weeks ago to make further progress on the disappeared from the Western Sahara conflict. Abdulaziz had not been available, but Pfefferle had met with several Polisario "ministers." The ministers agreed with the ICRC's desire to move forward more vigorously on the project and were amenable to meetings with the Moroccans, which the ICRC would chair. Pfefferle said he had just concluded a meeting with MFA Director of UN Affairs Nasser Bourita in Rabat, who had said the GOM also agreed in principle to sit around a table and review cases with the Polisario. Pfefferle said he wanted both sides to form a team or designate an individual who had the authority to declare that, based on the information presented, cases could be closed and the family members informed of their status. Pfefferle told Bourita informally that former political prisoner and head of the now defunct Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) was the kind of person the Moroccans might consider as their representative. Bourita countered that this responsibility was more likely to fall to someone from the Royal Council of Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), but he told Pfefferle he was just talking off the top of his head. Pfefferle told Polcouns the ICRC had no particular stake in who staffed the delegations from either side, as long as they had the authority to make decisions. Pfefferle added that another positive sign of Moroccan cooperation was that the IER had given ICRC full access to its casefiles concerning the disappeared in the Sahara, and ICRC had a staffer in Rabat this week starting to pore over them. Pfefferle said the Polisario also had a lot of information they had not yet shared; in Rabbouni he had visited a Polisario museum that had many documents from Moroccan soldiers on display in glass cases, but it appeared the Polisario had not kept written records on who these individuals were, where their bodies were, or how the documents had come into their possession. If properly collated, such data could prove very useful to the ICRC.

Comment

¶5. (C) The ICRC's project with the disappeared provides a potentially fruitful area of cooperation between Morocco and the Polisario, one in which it seems both sides have a stake in making progress. It will be a breakthrough if the ICRC can bring the two sides together, a development which could provide a foundation or momentum for the broader engagement between the two sides that we are seeking.

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Riley